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Cultural Resonance in Ornithonyms: An Analysis of Word-Formation Process in Cholanaikkan Tribes in Western Ghats, Kerala

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In the southernmost states of India resides one of the oldest aboriginal tribes named Cholanaikkan. This tribe is enriched with traditional knowledge and culture. The paper attempts to overlook the ethno-ornithological word formation in Cholanaikka language, a Dravidian sub-group language. According to the Census of India (2021), the tribe has a total population of 409. Through the morphological analysis of word formation process, the paper discusses namely, compounding and onomatopoeic word-formation. The paper analyses the Nouns formed as a result of endocentric and exocentric compounds based on their semantic criteria.

Key words: *Cholanaikkan tribe, Ethno-ornithology, Word-formation, Morphological analysis, Compounding, Kerala, Dravidian family.*

Introduction

Kerala, one of the South Indian states is home to many aboriginal tribes. The state has more than 40 tribes. Cholanaikkan is one of the oldest among them. This native tribal language is at the extremity of extinction today. Spread over the Western Ghats of Kerala in Karulai, Chunkathara and Vazhikkadav forest range, and has only 409 living tongues. Cholanaikkan's life depends on the luscious green

forest which is flourished by the heavy monsoons in the Western Ghats. The rich flora and fauna provide these tribes with edible wild roots, forest greens, wild mushrooms, seeds, plant shoots, honey, reptiles, wild animals etc.

Cholanaikka, the native tongue of the Cholanaikkan, belongs to the Dravidian language family. According to the UNESCO's world language endangerment index, Cholanaikka belongs to the "definitely endangered group". Even though the government has identified the tribe as a protected tribal group, the threat of language extinction still prevails among this tribe. To trace out one of the reasons, are the cultural mixing and the domination of Malayalam (Sri Lakshmi KM, 2021, 143).

Presently, the research and scientific studies done in this language is minimal. Hence, this paper attempts to elaborate on the word-formation process in Cholanaikka. Through this paper, we would like to bring the Cholanaikka language into the mainstream discussion. From the ethno-ornithological perspective of the Cholanaikkan tribe, the paper will discuss the compound word formation in the bird's name coinage. The paper looks into the compounds based on the semantic criteria namely, endocentric compounds and exocentric compounds.

Methodology

The paper is based on the field study conducted among the Cholanaikkan tribe in Kerala. The informants were selected from Alakkal, Kuppamala, Mannala, Myladippotti, Achanala, Manjiri, Nagamala, Panappuzha, Karimpuzha, Poochappara, Thalippuzha and Korappuzha in Nilambur Taluk of Malappuram district. The collected data on the bird names were elicited by applying the methodology of linguistic anthropology (Alessandro Duranti, 2012, 1-22) such as participant observation and in-depth interview. The participants included both male and female aged between 55- 75years. The interviews conducted during this research were unstructured and open-ended interviews. The collected data were subjected to the linguistic technique, morphological analysis. The study has also found the ethno-ornithological perspectives of Cholanaikka tribe from the linguistic analysis of bird lexicon.

Ethno-ornithological analysis

Ethno-ornithology can be defined as a comparative study between the relationship between human species and the bird species. Even though this is an emerging field, the relationship between humans and birds is as old as history. The mythologies, one of the earliest civilizations in India, the Indus valley civilizations which flourished 4000 years ago leaves the evidences of the close relationship between the humans and the birds in the form of cave painting and in terracotta toys and clay pottery (Bhatt, 2010, 146). In recent years, the study on the tribes of the Great Andamanese has also given evidence of the close-knit relationship and the dependency of Homo sapiens and the avian[1] (Anvita Abbi and Satish Pande, 2011).

The aboriginals have a closer bonding with the forest. The number of aboriginals living in the dense wood vicinity is much smaller compared to the population in the mainland. This is also one of the reasons for the aboriginals to have a propinquity to the forest flora and fauna. The rich oral tradition of the tribes, that is almost lost in time, is rich about their culture and legends in many of which the birds are portrayed as the saviour of the forest. For aborigines, there is a close relationship between biological events that they use to inform themselves about the readiness of food resources. For example, 'When spear grass (Sorghum plumosum/S. laxiflorum) has ripened, it's time the Magpie Geese laid their eggs' (Alpher, 1987).

Bird naming among the Cholanaikkan tribe of Kerala is an integral part of their cultural resonance. Each bird name given by the tribe echoes a brief history about the relationship between the birds and the aboriginals. The Cholanaikkan tribe has classified the names of birds in the forest based on their physical appearances, sounds and habitat. The birds range from common crows, pigeons, hunter birds, parakeets, forest canaries, forest Warners etc. The stories of their bonding are often echoed in the tribe's folklore. For example; the bird *cu:cu:tal,* warns the tribe of approaching dangers and the bird *ci:dal* sing longer in summers giving them a sense of the longer days. Most of the bird names are constructed through the process of compounding, and these names are attributed to an underlying meaning. This section will look into the morphological analysis of the word formation process

of the names of the birds along with a brief descriptive ethno-ornithological sketch of the birds in the Cholanaikkan's language.

45 vernacular names of birds from the Cholanaikka language were collected and analysed. The bird names given by the Cholanaikkan tribe are nouns. The noun bird names at times describe the general species of the bird, in order to specify the characteristics of the birds; the tribe has often derived the names through affixation and compounding. For the derived compounded names are attached with nouns, adjectives, and verbs in the word. There was no specific suffix that is attached to the root words. The root words or the nouns represented the species or the habitat of the avian.

The tribe commonly refers to birds as *gili* and *kujiri* however, in their native tongue the term for the bird is *akki*. According to the Dravidian Etymological Dictionary (1984), the bird is called *pakki* in the Kodagu language. *Hakki* also means bird in Kannada. We could find that the word *akki* is derived from *pakki.* This change is due to the apheresis (Lass, 1984, 186) that occurs according to the phonological rule. Aphaeresis is the initial deletion form in certain environments for ease of production. Hence, the term *pakki* became *akki* in the Cholanaikka language. Aphaeresis is a very common linguistic process in the Cholanaikka language (Lijisha AT, 2020).

The nest of the bird is formed with the compounding of Noun and Verb terms in it. The nest of birds, a noun, *akkipepidugoodu* meaning "the place from where the bird comes from", can be further analysed as *pepidu* means coming out, *goodu* means nest.

Findings

Compounding

Whitney (1894) mentions the classification of compounds according to Sanskrit grammar. English marks the compounds into three main categories copulative compounds, determinative, and secondary adjective compounds (Whitney, 1894:424). However, these compounds are adjacent to the three core compounds found in Sanskrit namely, *davntava, tatpurusha,* and *bahuvrihi*. Compounds are highly productive in the Cholanaikka language. According to O'Grady and Guzman (1996), human language is creative, and in order to create larger words, they add compounds by adding nouns, verbs and

adjectives in their language (1996, 143). Most of the ornithological names are formed as a result of compounding. In the Cholanaikka language, the tribe has conjoined two or more free morphemes to form noun words. The compounds in the Cholanaikka language are formed by the combination of Noun+ Noun, Verb+ Noun, and Adjective+ Noun. These compounds can be categorized mainly into two: endocentric compounds and exocentric compounds.

Endocentric compounds

Endocentric compounds are compounds with a head. These are words formed by the combination of two morphemes where one of the morphemes acts as a modifier to the head morpheme. Briefly, the head or the root morpheme decides the category of the modifier. Endocentric compounds can be divided into two: (i) right-headed compounds and (ii) left-headed compounds.

Right-headed Compounds

In right-headed compounds, the constituent elements are of nominal bases in general. In the right-headed compounds, the first root modifies the other root. As we are analyzing the 47 names of birds in this data, the result of the compounding process is always a noun.

A. Noun + Noun

1.alejakki - ale + akki
Cave bird

The compound noun formed from the noun *ale* means cave and *akki* is the generic term for bird. The Alpine swiftnests in the caves of the forest hence the name. This bird species uses their saliva to build their nest which tastes salty, is also used by the tribe in their cooking.

2. katte kujri – *katte* + *kujri*
Bamboo sparrow

In the Cholanaikka language, the noun word *kujri* refers to the sparrow species. The scaly breasted munias are called as *kattekujri*. The munia birds with gaps between their nodes reside in the bamboos called in their language as *katte*, a noun. According to the Cholanaikkan, these birds are largely seen during the flowering of bamboo. As these birds collect and feed on the bamboo rice, they are

known among them as *kattekujri*. Along with other insects, these birds eat grains.

3. a:lekujri – a:le + kujri
Devil's tree sparrow

This bird's name is derived from noun and noun words. The Indian rollers are called *a:le kujri* by the Cholanaikkan. In Tulu, Tamil and Kannada these birds are called *pa:lai kuruvi*. According to Sangham literature, *pa:lai thinai* is a temporary, seasonal landscape that occurs when one of the other regions suffers from extreme heat or drought. *Pa:lai* can occur within the mountains (Uma Sankar: 2016), chief flora of the *pa:lai* region is Wrightia species (ibid: 92). In Malayalam and Tamil Wrightia species are commonly called *pa:lai* which grow in *pa:lai* region. In Cholanaikka language, Wrightia species plants are known as *a:le mare* because of the process aphaeresis. Hence, the name *a:lekujri*.

4. a:mevende – a:me + avende
Tortoise dove

The common emerald dove is called *a:mesVei* by the tribe as the bird has a patch on its neck like the shell of a tortoise.

5.Ann gili – ann + giri
Solitude parrot

The vernal hanging parakeet is known as *ann giri* in the Cholanaikka language. These birds hang on the plants and play alone.

B. Adjective + Noun

In the right-headed nominal compounds of Cholanaikkan, Adjective + Noun compounds are also used to form bird names. In these compounds the first root is the modifier and the second, the modified.

6. ospavende – osp + avede
Glittering dove

This dove species, Orange-breasted green dove, has glittering feathers. Based on the shiny features of the dove, the tribe has named them as *ospavende*

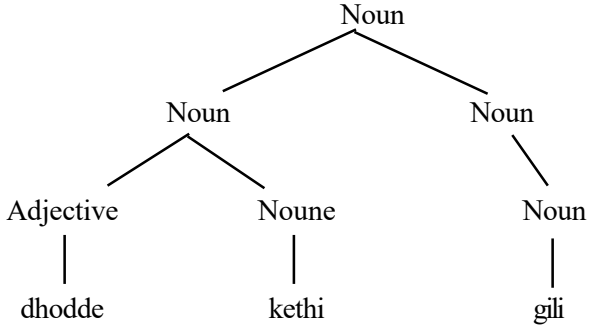
7. bellevende – bele + avende
White dove

This dove species has white colour head and neck, hence, the name.

C. Three morpheme Compound

Although compound words are largely built with two morphemes, it is difficult to draw an upper limit in this word-formation process. There are multiple compound words in many languages which are formed with three or more free morphemes. Consider the examples from English, *mother-in-law, father-in-law, brother-in-law, three-time looser,* etc. are formed with three free morphemes. As Fromkin, Rodman, Hyam (2007) argues on the similarity of having an internal structure in compound words like the derived words (2007: 58). This can correspond to the tree diagram for the word:

8. *dhodde kethi gili*- blue winged parakeet. *dhodde* –big –*kethi*- imitative sound- *gili* parrot



4.1.3. Left-headed Compound

In the left-headed compounding process, the second root modifies the first word. These compounds are a combination of the nominal and verbal roots. In the left-headed compound names of birds in Cholanaikka, the second root is the verb which modifies the head noun.

9.kanuthuruppan – kannu + turuppan

Eye opened

The Indian white eye is called as *kasuturuppan* by the tribe. This bird has a white circle around its eyes which gives the perceiver the illusion of the bird with opened eyes even when it's closed. The noun word is formed by the word-formation process of compounding where the noun *kannu* means eye and the verb *turuppan* means opened.

4.2 Exocentric Compound

Bloomfield (1933) classifies this as equivalent to English compounds copulative, determinative, and exocentric (1933: 235). Among these

bahuvrihi is considered an equivalent to the exocentric compound construction. The *bahuvrihi* or the headless construction words are found in the Cholanaikka language.

10.eleigumbici – elei+ gumbici, the one who can roll hair → Indian black-lored tit

The Indian black-lored tit or Indian yellow tit's name contains the posterior meaning. The noun is *elei* meaning hair is the anterior part of the word while the verb *gumbici* means the one who can roll, is the posterior term. According to the observations of Cholanaikkan, these Indian black-lored tits use human hair and roll it to build their nests hence the name *eleigumbici*, the one who can roll hair.

11.ci:dal – ci:d +al, the one who makes the whistling sound→ Malabar whistling thrush

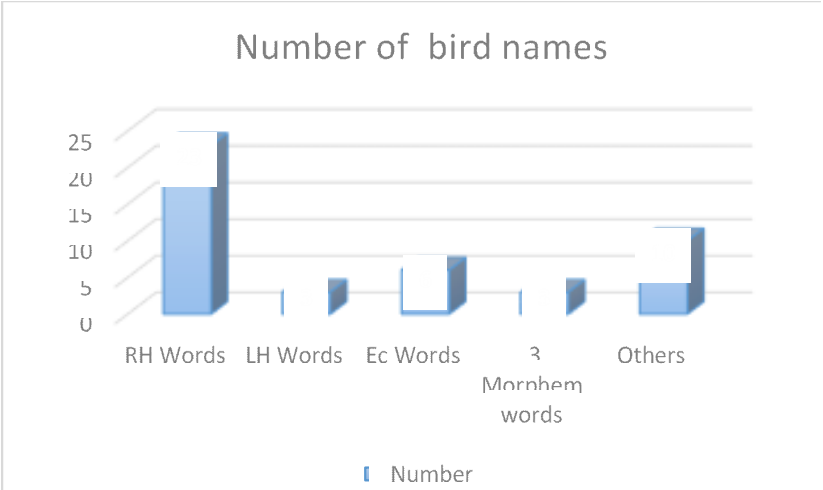
Popularly known as Malabar whistling thrush, this bird is known for its dawn-time songs. These early morning whistlers appear blackish with shiny patches of blue on the forehead and shoulders. The *cidal* birds have the ability to imitate the songs sung by the Cholanaikkan tribe. Because of their great singing ability, the tribe has named it *cidal, cid* means whistling *aal* means person, one who makes the whistling sound. According to the Cholanaikkan, these birds sing longer during the summers, which make the tribe aware the particular season, making them one of the favourite birds of the tribe. *cid* in Tamil means Skein of thread= eight *kuncham* and in Telegu it means a skein which is seven times the quantity called *punjamu*.

12.cu:cu:lal – cu:cu: + aal
An onomatopoeic sound person

These are colourful birds found notable for their distinctive "crown" of feathers. Also known as Common Hoopoe, these birds can dig the soil much faster with a *cu:r -cu:r* noise, and *aal* mean person, which gave them the name *cu:cu:lal*, the one who makes *cu:r -cu:r* sound. Here in the bird's name, we could also see the presence of onomatopoeia or imitation of the sound in the name. These birds mostly come out in the evening in search of food. They depend upon forest fruits and insects. Also, when the bird makes the *cu:r cu:r* noise and spreads the crown, alerts the tribe about the dangers including the presence of carnivorous animals.

13. manesu kottale – manesu+ kottate, mates/pairs who stammer → Bulbul

Bulbuls are known as *manesu kottale* in their language. In the language *manesu* is the noun term meaning pair or mates. In Tamil, Tulu and Kannada this term has the meaning bride-groom, mate, couple, pair or the love shared between two couples. The verb, *kottale* in the mentioned language means pamper/ stammer. As these birds are mostly seen in pairs and often share the love for each other, these birds are called *Manesu Kottale*



Discussion and Conclusion

The names demonstrated by the Cholanaikka tribe have been passed through generations. The tribe bird names are mainly formed through the morphological process of compounding. The language has endocentric compound bird names with both right-headed compounds and left-headed compounds. The right-headed compounds include Noun +Noun and Adjective + Noun construction while in the left-headed compounds, the first element is Noun and the second element is a Verb. On the other hand, the language also has bird names formed with exocentric compounds. The bird *cu:cu:ral,* Common Hoopoe's name is formed with an exocentric construction along with onomatopoeic formation. The Cholanaikkan have often compounded nouns, verbs, and adjectives words along with the common root morphemes of birds' *kujri* (sparrow), *akki* (parrot), and *avesde*

(dove). From the aboriginal perspective, the avian species are named after close keen observation and their relatedness to nature and its sounds. These ethno-ornithological names have travelled from the older generation to the younger generation and are still pristine.

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